



**UNITED STATES ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY
REGION 8**

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MAY 10 2011

Ref: EPR-N

Robert G. MacWhorter
Dixie National Forest Supervisor
1789 N. Wedgewood Lane
Cedar City, UT 84721

Juan Palma, Utah State Director
Bureau of Land Management
440 West 200 South, Suite 500
Salt Lake City, UT 84145-0155

Re: Comments on Final Environmental Impact
Statement/ Grand-Staircase-Escalante National
Monument Management Plan Amendment for
Tropic to Hatch 138kV Transmission Line
CEQ # 20110105

Dear Mr. MacWhorter and Mr. Palma:

In accordance with our responsibilities and authority under Section 102(2)(C) of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), 42 U.S.C. Section 4332(2)(C), and Section 309 of the Clean Air Act, 42 U.S.C. Section 7609, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Region 8 (EPA) has reviewed the Dixie National Forest's (DNF) Final Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) and Record of Decision for the Tropic to Hatch 138kV Transmission Line and Proposed Grand-Staircase-Escalante National Monument Management Plan (NMMP) Amendment. The Final EIS/Proposed NMMP Amendment assesses the potential impacts of a proposal to construct, operate, and maintain a single-circuit 138 kilovolt (kV) transmission line in southern Utah. The project would also decommission and remove the existing 69 kV line serving the local community. The project includes approximately 29 miles of new transmission line and building or expanding substations, and will require granting of a Special Use Permit adjacent to an existing utility passage zone designated by BLM. The Project Area is in Garfield County, Utah between the small rural communities of Tropic and Hatch. The Project proposes alignment of a 100-foot right-of-way for utility pole construction and includes all areas identified for building or expanding substations, temporary construction sites, temporary work spaces (lay-down yards and pulling and splicing sites), and areas where the existing 69 kV transmission line would be removed.

Alternative E, the Preferred Alternative, is a hybrid action derived from two of the three action alternatives analyzed in the Draft EIS. It is comprised of components of the action alternatives presented in the Draft EIS: Segments C-1 and C-3 from Alternative C, the East-West Interconnect option and a portion of Segment A-3 from Alternative A were combined into the most environmentally preferable action. The EPA was pleased to see that Alternative B that routed major segments of the alignment

through Bryce Canyon National Park was not selected. The Final EIS states that the DNF and cooperating agencies collaborated to identify resource concerns and combinations of alternatives that address or avoid areas of concern. The alternative routes were initially developed to address agency and public concerns with the locations of greater sage-grouse leks and Utah prairie dog colonies, visual resources, distinctive land areas, consistency with the National Park and National Monument management plans for the lands crossed by the alternative routes, and private property concerns. The EPA endorses this unity of effort to find an alternative that meets these potentially conflicting interests while meeting the proponent's purpose and need to bring more reliable electric service to rural communities.

The EPA appreciates the response to our comments on the Draft EIS in Appendix 1 of the Final EIS/Proposed NMMP Amendment. We were pleased to see the additional text under Section 3.4.2.5 that provides additional information on the impacts of the proposed action on drinking water source protection zones for both municipal public water systems and transient non-community public water systems. The Preferred Alternative in the Final EIS avoids construction activity on sensitive areas of groundwater recharge zones for municipal drinking water systems. We also are very appreciative of the efforts taken to avoid wetlands and to specify best management practices depending upon the type of waterbody crossing that must be made during construction.

In our review of the Draft EIS (March 15, 2010) EPA expressed additional concerns regarding the range of alternatives analyzed to meet the purpose and need for the project. We recommended that additional information on demand-side energy management and conservation incentives be provided in the Final EIS. The EPA was disappointed that this alternative was not considered in the Final EIS for failure to meet the purpose and need of the project. Many electric utilities include energy demand management strategies and customer conservation programs as an integral part of their integrated resource plans. Demand-side management involves reducing electricity use through activities or programs that promote electric energy efficiency or conservation, or more efficient management of electric energy loads. These efforts may:

- Promote high efficiency building practices.
- Promote the purchase of energy-efficient ENERGY STAR® products.
- Encourage the transition from incandescent lighting to more efficient compact fluorescent lighting.
- Encourage customers to shift non-critical usage of electricity from high-use periods to after 7 p.m. or before 11 a.m.
- Provide limited utility control of customer equipment such as air conditioners.
- Promote energy awareness and education.

The EPA found the approach for preparing an "abbreviated" Final EIS by incorporating the Draft EIS by reference and publishing only errata sheets with revised alternative comparison tables somewhat difficult to understand. We therefore had trouble comprehending whether the Preferred Alternative E had been adequately analyzed in the Draft EIS. For example, we expected both the short-term and long-term impacts from Alternative E to the highly erodible soils adjacent to water resources to lie somewhere between the number of acres disturbed for Alternative A (4.51 acres) and Alternative C (6.85 acres).

However, Table 2.10-7 states that Alternative E will impact 8.22 acres of highly erodible soils within 300 feet of drainages. This is an important disclosure and provides reason for asking the proponent to consult with the State of Utah on the appropriate permitting mechanism (the stormwater construction general permit or an individual permit) for this project.

Finally, we must comment on Appendix D: Fugitive Dust Management Plan. The EPA did not raise the issue of air quality impacts during construction in its comments on the Draft EIS. However, based upon the information in the Final EIS on the number of acres of highly erodible soils disturbed during construction, we recommend that the Forest Service construction inspectors pay particular attention to the Utah requirement R307-205. This regulation establishes minimum work practices and emission standards for sources of fugitive dust for projects located in all areas of the State outside PM₁₀ nonattainment or maintenance areas, including a maximum design value of 20% opacity. We are concerned that water from tanker trucks for dust suppression will be available in limited quantities and must be managed carefully. Appendix D provides very little guidance on control strategies for fugitive dust suppression. A good source of information for practical dust abatement strategies in the desert Southwest has been written by the Maricopa County Air Quality Department for the Phoenix PM₁₀ nonattainment area (Maricopa County Dust Control - Dust Handbook)¹.

The EPA appreciates the opportunity to review the Final EIS and Record of Decision for the Tropic to Hatch 138 kV Transmission Line Project and Proposed NMMP Amendment. We look forward to seeing how the commitments for mitigation of wetland impacts and waterbody crossings are implemented during construction. If you have any questions on the comments provided in this letter, please contact me at 303.312.6004, or you may contact James Hanley on my staff at 303.312.6725.

Sincerely,



Larry Svoboda
Director, NEPA Compliance and Review Program
Office of Ecosystems Protection and Remediation

¹ http://www.ecodustcontrol.com/dust_control_blog/bid/30558/Maricopa-County-Dust-Control-Dust-Handbook

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